

THE PARABLES OF JESUS, #018

A Chronological Study

*"To Him who opened His mouth in parables
and uttered things hidden since the creation of
the world."*

Psalm 78:2



"The Leaven"

The Mysteries of the Kingdom

Matthew 13:33-43; Lk 13:20-21¹

THE INTRODUCTION

The parables are the direct words of Jesus! Now, open your ears, sharpen your understanding, and hear what He has to say!

¹ All scriptures are from the NASB unless otherwise noted.

INTRODUCTION

Dr. James Boice, my pastor for 4 years at the Philadelphia college of Bible in Philadelphia, puts this parable in a group he calls "The Work of the Enemy." He introduces us to this section saying, *"Nothing good has ever come into the world without opposition and that is especially true in spiritual matters. Here we face not only the hostility and opposition of mere people like ourselves, but satanic or demonic opposition as well."*²

THE LINEAR TEXT [combining Matthew and Luke]:

In this parable we will take the verses out of order. This will **not** change the understanding of the parable however it may make it easier to follow Jesus' intension.

[Mt 13:34] *All these things Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables, and He did not speak to them without a parable. 35 This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:*

"I WILL OPEN MY MOUTH IN PARABLES; I WILL UTTER THINGS HIDDEN SINCE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD." ¹

[MT 13:33] *HE SPOKE ANOTHER PARABLE TO THEM,*

[Lk 13:20-21] *"The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three pecks of flour³ until it was all leavened."*

² James Montgomery Boyce, The Parables of Jesus, Moody Publishers, Chicago, 1983

³ 59.5 lbs. or 47 Kilograms

JESUS' INTRODUCTION

[Mt 13:34-35] *All these things Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables, and He did not speak to them without a parable. 35 This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:*

"I WILL OPEN MY MOUTH IN PARABLES; I WILL UTTER THINGS HIDDEN SINCE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD."⁴

I placed the last two verses of this segment first because I want to stress the eternal love that Jesus holds in His nature toward His believing brothers and sisters. We've seen this text concerning Jesus' teaching through parables to a people who "have ears to hear, and eyes to see." He places His teachings into a world of illustrations that the clouded minds of those who refuse to bend the knee to Almighty God cannot see through. They hear the words but miss the point.

For us, some 2000 years later, His illustrations take some study. We make the point in most every one of these studies that... "Context is Everything." It is so easy to place what we read in the Scriptures into our own current context - and miss the point of Jesus' words completely. We don't have to be great theologians to understand what Jesus has to say. He was speaking to plain, ordinary, people and telling them truths concerning the plan of God for them and what was going on around them in their day. While His messages are often simple illustrations, His meaning is quite often deeply profound. Here in this simple verse from the Psalms **[Mt 13:35; Psalm 78:2]**, Jesus speaks on one of the most profound truths found in the Scriptures,

"I WILL OPEN MY MOUTH IN PARABLES; I WILL UTTER THINGS HIDDEN SINCE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD."⁵

⁴ Psalm 78:2

⁵ Ibid.

In looking at this simple verse we first need to understand that the Glory of God through His amazing grace is the central focus of this truth. Since the book of Genesis reveals that humans are "Made in the image of God" [Gen 1:27], it then follows that, somewhere deep inside us, we all suffer from believing that we are little "gods." This is the most likely reason why we all think about ourselves all the time. Even when we find the love of our lives - we "feel" fulfilled because that person fills a love need in our own life.

I bring this up because in my research I have found so many writers and commentators on the Bible who think that we, as human beings, are so very important to the plan of God - "we somehow merit His favor." Not so! Our only importance to God... is that He has chosen to love us. In fact the Bible reports that Our God has chosen to "Love the whole world" through the giving of His Son for our forgiveness of the sins piled up against us [Jn 3:16]. This is why it is such an eternal offense to reject Jesus His Son, in Hebrew - the Messiah, in Greek - the Christ, in English - The Anointed One.

When we look at this simple verse, quoted from the Psalms, our first thoughts are probably, "How wonderful, I [mankind] am, so important since these truths are revealed for me!" Not so! You and I are absolutely not worthy of any gift or blessing. It is only through the grace of God - His love for you, through the blood sacrifice of His dear Son, that you acquire the forgiveness and blessings that He alone can give.

So, first fact from this quoted verse, "I do not merit the truths revealed in the parables of Jesus." They have been hidden from humanity "since the foundations of the world," and only by the grace of God are they now revealed to us in these parabolic stories.

THE PARABLES OF JESUS

[Mt 13:33a] *"He spoke another parable to them,"*

The book of Luke reveals the largest number of parables found in the Gospels. There we find about 34 individual parabolic stories - some labeled as parables, some not. Matthew reveals about 30, and Mark about 18, John... one. This particular parable is found in both Matthew and Luke. Approximately 17 parables precede this one chronologically in the Bible.

While the temptation is to say that this one parable is only a small part of the whole... we are reminded that this is the one where it tells us that the information hidden in the parables has been hidden from men, women, and nations "Since the foundation of the world." Therefore, their hidden, and now revealed meanings, are strategic to our understanding of Almighty God and His Kingdom(s). These meanings are bigger than the lessons for the garden of Eden, the early history of fallen man, the time of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the Nation of Israel, the Church, or the Millennium alone. These truths are for all time and eternity. They reveal the very nature of God who does not change. So, as you study all of Jesus' parables... be on the lookout for these eternal truths.

DEFINING THE KINGDOM

[Lk 13:33b] *"The kingdom of heaven"*

God is the ultimate sovereign King, and He sets up kingdoms under His domain (the universe and where He [the Trinity] alone dwells apart from that created universe). It may be easier to think of this as God, His created universe, and everything else (not created but outside of creation).

Jesus is speaking to His disciples in these - to use a modern phrase - "encoded" parables. Messages with meanings only some can "decode."

"The Kingdom of Heaven..." Since Jesus is speaking to His disciples using human known things as illustrations, we can assume that the "kingdom" He is describing is the sovereignty of God over the affairs of humans at that time in history [The Roman dominion over the Nation of Israel leading up to the ministry of Jesus, the Christ]. The Bible's context of the time of the Gospels includes the last years (70 A.D.) before the "setting aside of Israel" as God's focus for the distribution of the Gospel (the good news of God's plan for mankind through the Messiah) through the rebellious nation of Israel.

In that particular "Kingdom of God" the nation of Israel had repeatedly rebelled and willingly walked away from the love and sovereignty of God. At each rebellion it had gotten worse, and at the time of the Gospels had become so bad that the religious leadership of the nation were openly planning the death of their known God-promised Messiah - who would save them from their sins and lead them into the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God promised to their ancient "Father," Abraham. The leadership, and the people of that nation had fully turned away from that promise and instead, were intent on a physical, national, redemption from their Roman captivity and rule.

Delivery through a "Spiritual" messiah was outside the political intentions of Israel's leadership. So much so, that a "Spiritual messiah," would create problems with the Roman oppressors and prevent an Israeli "Freedom movement" from ever beginning. Thus, this Messiah must be "destroyed." In the background of that story is the constant desire of the Evil One to prevent God's plan for the delivery of God's beloved people and the eternal removal of the Evil One, his demons, and his authority and rule over the earth.

A LITTLE LEAVEN and A LOT OF FLOUR

Now we'll look at a simple everyday truth concerning a handful of yeast and its effects on 60 lbs. of flour - and apply our context - and hopefully see the mind of Christ in it.

THIS KINGDOM IS LIKE LEAVEN

[Mt 13:33c] *"The Kingdom of Heaven is like leaven,"*

Leaven: Yeast, a microscopic fungus consisting of single oval cells that reproduce by budding and converting sugar into alcohol and carbon dioxide. A grayish-yellow preparation obtained chiefly from fermented beer, used as a fermenting agent, to raise (through bubbles of carbon dioxide) bread dough, and as a food supplement. The alcohol evaporates through evaporation and baking. (Some types of yeast can cause infections or disease in humans).⁶

In Jesus' day you could take some dried grapes or figs, place them into an earthen jar, keep it at room temperature, stir at least once a day for 3-4 days. When bubbles form on the top and you smell a wine-like fermentation... you have yeast! Then you can pour out the fluid, dry it, and powder it.

Here's some data about the amount of flour Jesus mentions and what that means in the baking of some bread. In this data is hidden the secret of the extent of the quantity of the final mix... keep this in mind while you contemplate the problems of the satanic influence in the affairs of the nation of Israel at that time. Ask yourself, "How many pounds of flour would you need to bake some bread for your family?"

3 Pecks of wheat flour = 60 US Lbs. = 2172 cups.

⁶ Oxford English Dictionary

Using a standard bread recipe, a 1lb. bread pan holds approximately 5 cups of flour per loaf.

The above yields 434.4 approx. 1lb bread loaves.

Each cup of flour needs 0.5 teaspoon of yeast. There are 1086 needed full teaspoons, or 7.54 Lbs. of yeast in total for 60 Lbs. of flour almost exactly 8 percent of the total.

Now, how does that relate to our parable? First of all, that's a lot of flour for our woman to be making into bread at one time. That, of course is not the point of the parable - but it does indicate that the parable concerns something large - Israel, that "Kingdom of Heaven."

Ordinarily, we could look at this parable and see something good. A woman is making bread and she is making sure that the bread mixture is fully "leavened" or made with yeast and set aside before baking to let it rise - the normal product of mixing flour with yeast and water.

However, the context of Jesus words in this time in history when the religious leadership of Israel has turned against God and His Messiah (Jesus). The word "leaven" is used 29 times in the NASB Bible and most often, due to the sacramental nature of the Law of Moses - it is not allowed in the baking of ceremonial breads with the exception of "the sacrifice of thanksgiving of His peace offerings."⁷ **Any offering that included a blood sacrifice was against the Law if it included leavened bread.** Now consider that for a moment. In the symbolism of the blood sacrifices - evil was not to be allowed in any of the elements.

⁷ Leviticus 7:13, "with cakes of leavened bread"

Dr. James Boyce says about this parable:

"In nearly all cases in the Old Testament (and in Jewish life today) yeast is a symbol of evil... At the time of the feast of unleavened bread, every faithful Jew was to search his home for any trace of yeast and then get rid of it. That is done today by orthodox Jews and symbolizes for them, as it did earlier, the putting away of sin. Jesus spoke of the leaven (or yeast) of the Pharisees and Sadducees, and Herod, in each case meaning their evil influence (Mt 16:12; Mk 8:15). Paul described deviation from the truth of the gospel as Satan's persuasion, adding that believers should beware since "a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough" (Gal 5:9 NIV; cf. 1 Cor 5:6). Some have argued that yeast is yeast. But when it has a symbolic meaning, it is nearly always used of something evil rather than something good. It is difficult to see how an important and thoroughly understood symbol of evil could be used by Jesus to represent the exact opposite, namely, the blessed impact of His gospel on the world. And finally, it is significant that two parables (*the seed and the leaven*) are bracketed by that of the devil's work in sowing tares among the wheat (Mt 13:24-30), and Christ's explanation of that parable (vv 36-43). This structure suggests that this parable should be taken not as teaching something entirely different from the parable of the tares, but as expanding it."⁸

(A quick explanation - leaven and its effects upon flour are used to demonstrate its explosive and infiltrative qualities, not specifically its good or evil qualities.)

Jesus was, of course, speaking to His disciples concerning the state of Israel and His eventual blood sacrifice on the Cross. He was telling them that the nation had become fully involved in "the leaven" of total hypocrisy among the religious leadership and the people. "As the leadership goes... so goes the nation."⁹ He was

⁸ James Montgomery Boice, *The Parables of Jesus*, American Reformed Christian Theologian, former pastor of the 10th Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia, PA, Moody Press, 1983, pp 29-30

⁹ Clarence B. Mason, Dean of Students, Philadelphia College of bible, 1971

telling His disciples that, at that time in history, virtually the entire nation of Israel was acting, "against the Law of God." A very serious charge indeed - but a charge made by God Himself.



“Consider His Blood Sacrifice”

This is absolutely not a pretty picture. But it is one to deeply consider. What was done to this absolutely innocent God/man was just what you and I should have done to us because of our sin and constant rebellion against our God and His Law of holiness. Human beings who, from before the foundation of the world, were given free will to choose between belonging to the God of the universe, trusting Him, His Son, His Holy Spirit, and His Word in faith... or rejecting Him as God with our own selfish "I will not subject myself to Him" human will.

Take some time to search the Scriptures for all the things He has done for you. (see “The Blessings of God Upon You” pg. 10b) Consider your relationship with Almighty God. Consider your relationship with His Son Jesus. This simple little 1-line parable is all about our Holy God and the awful mess that the Human

kingdom has become. Worship Him, Believe in His Son, and the blood of the Cross.

“THE BLESSINGS OF GOD UPON YOU”
Ephesians 1:3-14¹⁰

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love 5 He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. 7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace 8 which He lavished on us. In all wisdom and insight 9 He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him 10 with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him 11 also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, 12 to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory. 13 In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, 14 who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God’s own possession, to the praise of His glory.

¹⁰ The New American Standard Bible

FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS WITH ANSWERS

1. Itemize in Matthew Chapter 13 the parables of Jesus before and after this little parable and summarize your findings.

Before:

The Parable of the Sower - God's program for who will, and who won't receive God's Word.

The Parable of the Tares - The Devil's placing of his minions amongst the people of God.

The Parable of the Mustard Seed - The expansion of Israel and the Church and the evil which comes to roost in them.

After:

The Parable of the Hidden Treasure

The Parable of the Costly Pearl

The Parable of the Dragnet

We haven't done the studies on these together yet... so you're on your own!!

2. Why did God wait until Jesus to disclose the "hidden" meanings in the parables?

With Jesus' appearance on the earth began the introduction of the "New Covenant" for Israel. Unfortunately, that introduction for them was delayed because of their rejection (and murder) of their messiah. They are currently "set-aside" until the return of Jesus at His 2nd coming. In the meantime, the members of the Body of Christ, the Church (both Jew and Gentile), are benefitting from the elements of that New Covenant as we are destined to participate in it fully in the Kingdom age to come. Jesus has given us these parables so that we may understand both the Kingdom of Heaven at His time, our time, and the one to come.

3. Why is this parable so important (2 reasons)?

First, it is Jesus' announcement to His disciples (including those who believe) that what He is teaching concerns things not told before. You might even refer to them as "Keys to the Kingdom."

Second, it is a warning to His disciples then and now, that within the earthly Kingdom activities of God there will be a continued growth of evil and satanic influences - it is part of His program of bring men and women unto Himself through His Spirit and His Word.

4. Which "Kingdom of Heaven" does this parable concern itself with?

The immediate context suggests that the "Kingdom of Heaven" in this parable is concerned primarily with God's sovereignty over the last effective days of the nation of Israel and its final rejection of Jesus as their Messiah. But its truths extend on through His disciples, especially following Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit to begin the Church Age. While satan's "kingdom" was destroyed at the Cross, he still exercises his hatred toward God and believers until his ultimate delivery to the Lake of Fire for eternity.

5. Why was Israel's religious leadership against Jesus?

There are multiple reasons for their rejection of Jesus as their Messiah. First, would be their rejection of Almighty God as their personal god. Second, would be the dramatic satanic activity surrounding the presence of the Son of God as Messiah on earth, satan's domain. Third, would be the unchanged human hearts of Israel's leadership (Scribes, Sadducees, Pharisees). They were concerned with themselves, their political power, their financial wealth, and their religious power. If they allowed Jesus to live and establish the Kingdom of God on earth, as promised to Abraham, then all of them would be tossed out and completely replaced with

righteous men and women. Fourthly, they were afraid of the Romans as the occupiers of their lands. If Jesus began to establish His Kingdom the Romans would attempt a crusade to wipe out Israel, its leadership, and its people.

6. Is Leaven (yeast) to be seen as good or evil in this passage?

Largely, there are two divisions of Christian theology that dictate where you stand on this parable (and many of the others.) If you fall into the PreMillennial theological camp (the Church of Jesus Christ being removed from the earth to heaven by Jesus before the Tribulation and Millennium, then you see the issues of this parable as negative. This theological camp (I belong to it) reads the scriptures according to the "Normal, literal, historical" method of interpretation - basically, "it means what it says." When you see it that way the tribulation and the millennium are in the future. Therefore... things are not going to get better in the near future until Jesus returns. If you fall into the post-Millennial theological camp, then you see the issues of this parable as positive. This theological camp reads more symbolism into their interpretations and sees the Roman conquest of Israel as part of tribulation and the expansion of the Church Age as millennial. Therefore, things should be getting better and better until Christ returns.

7. What is the "big picture" of this parable?

From where I stand, Jesus was warning His disciples, and us, that evil is in the world (satan's dominion) and to expect that he will attempt to infiltrate (successfully) into the Church, the Body of Christ, in order to counteract righteousness and God's grace in its people and in the world at large - like leaven when you introduce it into your bread mix, and it will expand and keep expanding until fully involved.

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effort has been made to give proper footnote credit for items that are quoted. J. Deering [AncientPath.net] is the author and editor of this study.

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Jeremiah 18:15

"Don't stumble from the Ancient Path"
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